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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolving Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between the University of Alabama and Holt High School by illuminating an interdisciplinary civil rights unit developed by school- and university-based faculty. The study investigated how using young adult literature affected students' perspectives during the unit and examined the impact of young adult literature on preservice teachers' and university/school-based instructors' beliefs and practices. A collaborative team in social studies and language arts selected the novel, "The Watsons Go To Birmingham--1963," for the unit because of its relevance to students. The project used authentic literature to provide focus, create coherence, and enable students to understand the what and why of learning during content area instruction. It also provided increased occasions for preservice teachers to reflect on teaching as a profession. Data collection included: interviews with participants before, during, and after the unit; surveys of participating middle and high school students and student teachers; field notes; and teacher and student artifacts. Results indicated that it was useful to include literature in the content classroom, to use literature that was relevant to students, and to have a collaboration between the school-based and university-based community. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning at a Professional Development School

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Abstract

This paper discusses the evolving PDS partnership between the University of Alabama and Holt High School by illuminating an interdisciplinary Civil Rights unit developed by school-based and university-based faculty. Holt High, a Title I school, has been a PDS since 1997 and serves as a site for teacher preparation and professional development.

National standards in social studies and language arts advocate using trade books in all content areas. Recognizing the importance of using literature as a teaching tool across disciplines, our collaborative team in social studies and language arts selected The Watsons Go To Birmingham--1963 as the primary novel for the unit because of the novel's relevance to our own community. The purpose of the project was two-fold: (1) to use authentic literature to provide focus, create coherence, and enable students to understand the what and the why of learning during content area instruction and (2) to provide increased occasions for pre-service teachers to design curricula, practice, and reflect on teaching as a profession. The experience is best summarized by the comments of one veteran teacher: "We are building bridges between the University and our school. We have become real people to each other--friends and colleagues. Before, we were just names on paper."

Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning at a Professional Development School

Recent literature in educational reform suggests that America's public schools, as they currently exist, do not adequately prepare students for their roles as productive citizens in the twenty-first century (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes, 1990; Kennedy, 1990). In order to effectively prepare learners of all ages, a critical redesign of practices in traditional teacher training programs has led to the development of professional development schools (PDS). The role of PDSs in preparing teachers is often compared to clinical sites or teaching hospitals in the medical profession where professionals and interns collaborate and work together to achieve goals (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes, 1990). The PDS, however, is much more than a clinical or teaching school. It is, for education, a totally new institution (Holmes, 1990).

In the PDS, in-service teachers work collaboratively with pre-service teachers in partnership with university faculty who serve as facilitators, instructors, and collaborators. PDSs have been well received and are presently playing important roles in restructuring public schooling by determining what works so that information and noted findings can be disseminated to other schools (Abdal-Haqq, 1992). Recent findings indicate that as a result of being trained in PDS programs with intensive field training and collaborative teaching and learning, teachers are better able to meet the challenges of changes in educational situations and diverse settings (Levine, 1997).

PDSs are maintained through partnerships with colleges of education and public institutions. These partnerships are forms of professional collaboration designed to provide mutual benefits to educators and students at all involved institutions. The Tuscaloosa (AL) County and City School Systems have joined in formal partnership with The University of Alabama in an effort to promote and enhance the growth of professional educators in the west

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Alabama area and to increase the quality of education in the schools and in the College of Education. This partnership, the Alabama Consortium for Educational Renewal (ACER), was formalized in 1997, and has been a member of the Holmes Partnership continuously since that time (Holmes, 1990). ACER has as its ultimate goal the increased success and achievement of students at all levels through simultaneous renewal of programs. This goal is being met through the growth of PDSs in the Tuscaloosa area.

The Collaboration

Major Goals

According to the goals of ACER, a PDS has a three-fold purpose: (a) to serve as a site for pre-service education, (b) to develop inquiry projects (research), and (c) to provide opportunities for in-service education. Educators at UA and our partner schools develop and work toward common goals for education. This creates a willingness to examine practices and implement work differently and a willingness to revisit existing plans and activities. Public school teachers who are involved in our PDS programs see themselves as actual stakeholders in the supervision, assessment, and achievement of pre-service teachers and the teacher education program.

Evolution of the Collaboration

Holt High School, located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama is the partner secondary school. Faculty from both educational institutions voted to begin this relationship during the Spring of 1997. Subsequently, faculty developed a mission statement for the relationship which focused on the ". . . promotion of civic responsibility and excellence in academic achievement. . . ." for secondary and university students.

Holt High School, a Title I 7-12 secondary school in Tuscaloosa county, houses approximately 850 students from its nearby iron and steel producing community. There are a

total of 58 teachers, three guidance counselors, one librarian, and several support personnel in the school. Sixty-five percent of the faculty hold masters degrees or higher. Approximately half of the students receive free or reduced lunch, indicating family incomes in the lower ranges. The racial makeup is 65 percent white, 33 percent African American, and two percent Hispanic American. The school, constructed in 1944, is a point of pride for the Holt community and many of the students are third and fourth generation Holt students.

Currently, university and school faculties are collaborating on several different levels to better serve the students and faculty at both sites. For example, teacher education courses are taught collaboratively at the school. Secondary students enrolled in an introductory secondary education course are team taught by school-based and university-based faculty at Holt. Prior to the student teaching experience, students enroll in the methods block that is taught on-site as well. During this experience, faculty members collaborate to develop meaningful experiences for this phase of our pre-service teachers' development. These experiences have included demonstration lessons taught and debriefed by the school-based faculty, in-class teaching opportunities and debriefings, e-mail dialogues with collaborating classroom teachers, and service learning by university faculty and pre-service teachers. Other activities in the PDS collaboration include faculty cooperation on research and curriculum projects and presentations of their work at state and national conferences. Finally, a major focus is collaborative interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

Interdisciplinary Teaching

Integrating quality contemporary young adult literature into the curriculum is one way to create rich literacy communities where students have opportunities to read literature containing plots consistent with their experiences, themes of interest to them, main characters who are

young adults, and language that corresponds to their own language (Bushman & Bushman, 1997). Students are motivated to read when they see characters and situations reflecting their own experiences.

Operating from the framework that classrooms must be alive, inclusive, authentic, and meaningful for all students (Gallo, 1992), school-based and university-based faculty at Holt used the contemporary young adult novel, The Watsons Go To Birmingham--1963, as the primary novel in an interdisciplinary language arts and social studies unit focusing on equality, justice, respect, and freedom. The collaborative effort involved secondary students and pre-service English language arts and social studies teachers in an active process of reading, responding, sharing, and crossing borders. The primary goal was to use literature to enrich the traditional way the history of the Civil Rights Movement is taught.

Studying the process and the outcomes was a way to investigate the usefulness of collaborating and teaching at the PDS. Bullough, Kauchak, Crow, Hobbs, and Stokes (1997) noted that effective collaboration among all participants is a necessary component at PDS sites where ideas are shared, common perspectives are shaped, and sustained professional growth and development happen. Therefore, the purposes of this study were (a) to determine how the use of young adult literature affected the perspectives of students during a unit of study on the Civil Rights Movement and (b) to determine the impact of young adult literature on the beliefs and practices of the pre-service teachers and university/school based instructors.

Theoretical Perspectives

Much research suggests that literature is a valuable teaching tool in the content classroom (e.g., Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998). National standards in social studies and language arts advocate using trade books, novels, and other authentic reading tasks to provide focus, create

coherence, and enable students to understand what and why they are learning in content area instruction.

Using Young Adult Literature

Teachers must facilitate students' active engagement in reading, speaking, writing, and listening tasks (Atwell, 1998). When students actually read, comprehend, and respond to good literature that they enjoy, they develop and practice literacy skills. Research which supports this position includes Reed's (1994) conclusions that the young adult novel specifically (a) helps improve the reading skills of adolescents; (b) encourages adolescents to read more books, thereby improving their abilities to read; (c) allows teachers to incorporate more books of interest to adolescents into the curriculum, thereby avoiding the non-reading curriculum or workbooks and lectures; and (d) facilitates the development of an inclusive curriculum.

Value of Multicultural Literature

Applebee's (1989) study investigating the most frequently used book length titles revealed the need for more curricular integration today given the diversity in the student population and the quality literature routinely omitted. Therefore, literacy teachers must use diverse literature as one way to develop and expand multicultural understandings (Bieger, 1996). Research (e.g., Richard & Ernst, 1993; Rogers & Soter, 1997) suggests that one goal in selecting literature must focus on helping all students see their realities reflected in the texts used in schools. When students (adolescents and pre-service teachers) can make personal connections, learning becomes much more authentic, exciting, meaningful, and fun for them (Bushman & Bushman, 1997; Zeek & Wickstrom, 1999). Multicultural literature provides mirrors through which students can read about situations that resemble their own worlds, discover the richness of differences in cultures other than their own, and learn to appreciate those differences.

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Method

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were two university-based faculty (language arts/literacy, social studies/literacy), 28 pre-service teachers enrolled in their content methods and literacy courses (12 language arts, 16 social studies) each semester, two school-based faculty (middle school language arts, secondary social studies, and their students for two semesters.

As part of the PDS effort, the methods block courses in language arts, social studies, and content area literacy were taught on-site for the first time during the Spring, 1999 semester at the high school. In preparation for this, the teaching team, a middle school language arts teacher, a high school social studies teacher, a language arts teacher educator, a content area literacy instructor, and social studies teacher educator met during the Fall, 1998 semester to prepare common goals and objectives for the spring semester.

Since different levels would be targeted, the teaching team decided to select a piece of literature that would have relevance to the community of learners at all levels (middle school students, high school students, pre-service teachers, and faculty). The book selected and its topic would serve as a theme for the methods block courses and would be read in the middle/secondary and university classrooms. Subsequently, the teaching team selected The Watsons go to Birmingham--1963 as the novel. After reading and discussing the book together, the educators believed that the book would challenge the students' ideas about the Civil Rights Movement, promote opportunities for discussion, and stimulate the study of local and family history.

Holt High School is located near the site where Governor George C. Wallace made the famous stand in the schoolhouse door and an hour away from the location of the church bombing at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church depicted in The Watsons go to Birmingham--1963.

Although Alabama is rich with history from the events of the Civil Rights Movement, many students in both school-based and university-based classrooms did not have an informed understanding of the events that are part our community's history. As a result, the teaching team decided to focus on this topic drawing on community resources and experiences. The study of the novel would engage all participants in an active process of reading responding, sharing, and crossing borders. The instructors hoped to enrich the traditional way in which the Civil Rights Movement was taught. University-based instructors and their students would assist with the instruction in the middle and high school classrooms and that both school-based teachers would confer with and debrief the pre-service teachers. The unit would culminate with a fieldtrip to the Civil Rights Museum and the Sixteenth Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Procedure

This study took place over the Spring 1999 and Fall 2000 semesters. During each semester, the novel was read and discussed in the language arts, social studies, and content area literacy methods classes as well as the high school social studies and middle school English classes. Literary elements were analyzed and conclusions were drawn about the author's overarching purpose and relevant themes. Research questions that guided this study were (a) How did the use of young adult literature affect the perspectives of the middle school and high school students? and (b) What was the impact of the young adult literature on the beliefs and practices of the pre-service teachers and university/school-based instructors.

Interdisciplinary teaching experiences in the language arts classroom

The middle school students in Ms. Callison's English class read the novel aloud and silently and listened to audiotaped and teacher readings throughout the four week study of the novel. Ms. Callison employed a variety of literacy strategies (e.g., journal writing, KWL, think

alouds) to aid in her students' understanding of the novel. An important part of the novel is the travel of the Watson family from Flint, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama. Pre-service teachers and university-instructors facilitated a geography map activity developed by Ms. Callison that required mapping skills, mathematics, critical thinking, and research skills.

For the language arts educators, journal writing was one strategy used throughout the unit to facilitate learning before, during, and after reading. Students responded to queries, wrote their reactions to daily readings, and reflected on class activities and the field trip to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and Civil Rights Museum. The students also responded to actual news telecasts of the bombing. They wrote their reactions in the form of letters to a hypothetical editor. Other strategies included vocabulary strategies, music, poetry, and discussion guides.

Pre-service social studies teachers and their instructor collaborated with Ms. Callison to develop lessons that addressed the historical context of the novel. Planning took place electronically with e-mails and web postings of the lessons as they evolved. The lessons included photograph/document analysis (e.g., Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," biopoems, writing roulette). Following these activities, Ms. Callison debriefed each group of methods/literacy students.

Interdisciplinary teaching experiences in the social studies classroom

The pre-service social studies teachers had a variety of experiences in Ms. Lake's World Affairs elective class for grades 9-12. As a group, the pre-service teachers decided to focus their efforts on building literacy opportunities. Prior to teaching their lessons, the pre-service teachers and their university instructor worked with Ms. Lake, observed lessons, viewed historical documentaries on the Civil Rights Movement with the class, and facilitated activities related to

the book. Like Ms. Callison, Ms. Lake used a variety of strategies to read the book (e.g., student and teacher reading alouds, audiotaped readings).

The students felt that there was a need to develop activities that would emphasize the emotional aspects of racism and the bombing of the church depicted in the novel. While planning their lessons, the pre-service teachers were engaged in leading discussions related to the novel. For the lessons, the pre-service teachers used the biopoem and writing roulette strategies. Following the lessons, the pre-service teachers were debriefed by Ms. Lake.

Data sources and data analysis

Data sources included interviews with the participants before, during, and after teaching the novel; open-ended surveys for middle and high school students and pre-service teachers to determine the impact of the novel on their perspectives; and field notes. Teacher and student artifacts (lesson plans, journal entries, student work) were collected to examine how the novel shaped the beliefs and practices of the participants. All data were analyzed for emerging patterns and trends using constant comparative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This analysis included careful member checks and triangulation of data by the research team that included the four instructors, a doctoral student, and a teacher educator.

Results

Results are organized around emergent categories reflecting the purpose of the research. One theme across the groups was the change in participant perspectives regarding their views of young adult literature. For example, after beginning to read the novel, pre-service social studies teachers questioned the use of this novel with high school students. One pre-service teacher stated, " I feel like reading this book is just a waste time. It is not content-oriented enough." Some of the pre-service teachers questioned employing literature that had "an easy reading level"

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with high school students. However, after working in Ms. Lake's classroom, this pre-service teacher commented: "I cannot believe how much the students learned from the book…I definitely plan to use this book and other literature when I have my own classroom…." One student that affected this particular pre-service teacher as well other pre-service teachers was a high school senior categorized as at-risk in the World Affairs social studies course. At the conclusion of the unit, he told the students that The Watsons was the first book that he had ever read from "cover-to-cover."

The relevance of the book's topic to all of the participants' community was important, particularly to the African American students. The idea of voice and identity was exemplified by one student who wrote: "I'm glad I got to learn more about *my* ancestors. I may not have experienced many of the racist acts back then, but I'm glad that I have had a chance to see pictures and structures and hear stories from…the Civil Rights Movement." After visiting the Civil Rights Museum and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, one student wrote: "I liked the museum because it was very historic. The church was cool because I thought that I walked down the same hall as those girls did." Another student wrote: "I learned about my culture. I heard the speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., all of it."

The novel made an impact across racial and cultural backgrounds. Joan, a Caucasian pre-service teacher from Ohio wrote about the novel in her journal:

> I really enjoyed the novel, The Watsons Go To Birmingham. Since I am from Ohio, I could identify with the Northerners' perceptions of Alabama. The stereotypes Byron and Kenny entertained were similar to those that many non-Alabamians have. Stereotyping is unfair; understanding that we hold certain stereotypes can be helpful in our processes of change. The historical content in the novel was also very interesting to me. I am

ashamed to admit it, but I had never heard of the bombing until I moved to Alabama. Such violence is so tragic. It is incomprehensible to me how ignorance and hatred could lead a group of people to kill innocent children. This legacy of hate does not have to continue; education can help all of us better understand one another.

One goal of the pre-service teachers was for their lessons to make the book relevant to all of the students by helping the students to feel empathy and identify with the characters in the book as well as the people who lived through the racism and violence of the time period. The writing roulette activity which allowed four different writers to create one story using a prompt that placed the writer at the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and a word bank developed by the pre-service teachers used in Ms. Lake illusttates this point:

Student 1: In 1963 I was about to go to church on a Sunday afternoon. As I walked up to the church, chaos struck. Many families were running from the sanctuary screaming. The confusion of the people both in and out of the church was so high, because they did not know what had happened. I cannot describe the anger that I felt.

Student 2: I immediately felt the extreme racism and prejudice of the people in Birmingham. As I stood there at the church, I was shell-shocked and didn't know what I could do to help. I had no idea that such discrimination would lead to such a disastrous [sic] bombing.

Student 3: Although this was an [sic] terrible act of segregation and everyone was upset about the loved ones they lost and asked for forgiveness from the Lord.

Student 4: We have to do right for ourselves because, if we don't, it wouldn't [sic] ever be right around here.

Collaboration emerged as another major theme of this study. This was particularly apparent for the instructors and pre-service teachers. Interviews and surveys indicated the

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teachers' appreciation of the exchange of ideas among educators. One of the university instructors wrote: "This novel has served as catalyst for discussion and collaboration. It has opened doors across disciplines as well..." During an interview, the classroom teachers explained how participating in the methods instruction made them feel "valued by the university faculty." One school-based teacher wrote: "We are building bridges between the academic environments through mere contact. We have become real people to each other--friends and colleagues. Before, we were just names on paper." Collaboration was also important to the relationships formed between the school-based teachers and pre-service teachers as they planned the lessons.

Collaboration between university pre-service teachers and the Holt students was important as well. In particular, the middle school students in Ms. Callison's class wrote in their journals about their "other teachers." During many activities (poetry writing, map activity, document analysis), the pre-service teachers worked alongside small groups of students. The students enjoyed their relationships with their "other teachers." This was reciprocated by the pre-service teachers who enjoyed serving as facilitators during the activities and discussions. In class discussion the pre-service teachers explored how the students informed their construction of ideas about the book.

Discussion

The findings from this study emphasize the importance of including literature in the content classroom (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998), particularly when the literature can address the experiences of all learners (Richard & Ernst, 1993; Rogers & Soter, 1997). Pre-service teachers concluded that literature was a vehicle for developing student motivation and learning for their students (Reed, 1994).

This study revealed the importance of studying literature with connections to the students and their community. Giving voice to and acknowledging his identity, one African American student noted that reading The Watsons…"I learned about *my* heritage." Several other African American high school students remarked about the link between their own family members who had been part of the Civil Rights Movement and their desire to read The Watsons. Utilizing authentic activities helped students develop a better understanding of the literature (Bushman & Bushman, 1997) and motivation to learn from it (Reed, 1994). Similarly, the pre-service teachers, even those students not originally from this community, were able to utilized their personal knowledge and experiences to enhance their knowledge and perspectives of the literature (Zeek & Wickstrom, 1999).

Finally, this research highlighted the impact of collaboration among members of the learning community. The collaboration that took place between the school-based and university-based faculty was consistent with Bullough, Kauchak, Crow, Hobbs, & Stokes (1997) who asserted the need of collaboration for effective growth and development at a Professional Development School. The partnership that emerged disputes Goodlad's (1993) finding that teachers feel subservient to their university counterparts.

Similar opportunities for collaboration across disciplines should be encouraged in an effort to increase the use of quality young adult literature. Future research should examine (a) the impact of integrating additional multicultural young adult literature and (b) the impact collaboration among other content area and university instructors involved in this process of professional development at a PDS.

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